

## **Scorpion Grasses by PimpedOutGreenEars**

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**Summary:** "Tell everyone... Tell everyone I'll miss them. And Eds, tell him... Just promise to call him Eds for me every once in a while. So he won't forget me." On his last night in Derry Richie shares a bottle of wine with Bev. He makes promises to send letters he knows he won't remember to write, cries a lot, and then ends it with the boy he loves who's just dumb enough to love him back.

## 1. Chapter 1

### Scorpion Grasses

**Author's Note:** So this has been sitting in my drafts since the end of 2015, and with all the It hype surrounding the new movie I'm finally close to finishing it! My initial goal was to post this as a one-shot before the movie came out, but I'm not making great time on it so I'm splitting it into two parts. The next part will hopefully be out soon, maybe before the movie, but probably a little after.

Anyway, important thing to note, this is primarily novel verse. I mention that because I know in the new movie Richie's mom is an alcoholic and I would have handled the teen drinking much differently had I been going with that version.

And I say primarily novel because I messed us some details, such as Bill canonically moving away before Richie does. Oops. I also think the way I address the kids forgetting things isn't necessarily as cannon as it could be. But hopefully y'all can forgive me on those points and enjoy this!

Let me know what you think!

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Beverly laughed as she and Richie fell down into soft grass, the light of the moon reflecting off of Richie's Coke bottle glasses.

"I can't believe you talked me into this," Beverly said as she rolled over to face Richie.

"Naw, Miss Scarlett, you didn't seem to need too much convincing," Richie pointed out as he reached over and ran a hand over the top of Beverly's red hair.

The two thirteen year olds were lying drunk about halfway down Jackson Street in a patch of green grass. Tomorrow morning Richie and his family would be packing up and leaving Derry, so to give himself a proper sendoff Richie had lifted a bottle of wine.

Richie had hoped all of his friends in Derry could drink it with him, but as it turned out it hadn't been an option due to varying circumstances. Actually Beverly shouldn't even be with him, if her father caught her she'd pay for it, but she hadn't been able to bear the idea of Richie spending his last night alone.

"I hate that everyone isn't with us." Beverly didn't have to say who everyone was. Richie knew.

"I think you're just missing your *boyfriends*," Richie teased, if for no other reason than to avoid the ache creeping up in his heart.

Beverly clumsily managed to reach over and punch Richie's arm. "Shut up."

"Ow! Why do you hurt me so, Bevie!" Richie cried as he flailed around in the grass dramatically.

"Beep beep, Richie!" Beverly called, but the laughter surrounding the words only encouraged him.

Eventually he quieted and her laughter died down as they lie looking up at the moon.

"I really don't know what to do with Bill and Ben," Beverly admitted after they'd been quiet for awhile.

"Give 'em up. Run away with me. Anywhere you want, Miss Scarlett," Richie suggested as he threw an arm around her middle.

Beverly smiled before kissing his cheek. "I don't know where I'd want to go."

"I'd want to travel the country. Go to all of the best rock concerts," Richie said confidently.

"I bet you will someday," Beverly told him as she scooted closer.

"I wish you guys could be with me," Richie confessed, the ache in his heart coming back.

"We're just a letter or phone call away," Beverly reminded him,

although there was a part of him that doubted that.

He thought of Stan Uris who had moved last summer. Of how none of them had heard from him even once. He couldn't believe Stan just didn't want to talk to them. Somehow he knew there was a reason for it. And there was a part of him that was prepared to never talk to his best friends again even though the thought pained him.

But he didn't tell Beverly this.

"I know," he said no more than that. And that was probably what prompted Beverly to say something that would get him talking.

"I really couldn't live with myself if I hurt either of them. Ben or Bill."

"Aw, lassie, they like you too much to be hurt. They know that'd hurt you," Richie said in a Scottish accent that was messed up more than usual as Richie's words slurred together.

Still, Beverly laughed, maybe even laughing more because of it.

Once she had quieted, she turned gently to Richie, a smile on her face. "What about you, Richie? Do you like any girls?"

"I say, and I say only the truth, you're the only girl for me, Red. If I can't have you, I shant have none of 'em!" Richie's accents ran together as he made his declaration.

"You're so full of it, Richie!" Beverly cackled as she pushed against his arm.

Richie laughed with her, but even as he did so, his mind wondered to the boy who was on his mind just as often as Beverly was on the mind of Ben or Bill.

Richie's feelings for Eddie had changed over the last couple of years, bending and twisting slowly until just the sight of Eddie had every voice in Richie's head speaking at once, trying to be the one chosen to get the shorter boy's attention.

At first Richie had brushed off the change. Wanting Eddie's attention so bad hadn't seemed so strange in the grand scheme of things that

had happened in his life. First off, Richie was *always* gunning for attention. You didn't become a man with a thousand voices if you didn't want people to listen to you. And then there was finding out that Stan, his first best friend, was moving. So of course he had wanted to fill up that gap.

So the sudden urge to spend so much time with Eddie hadn't concerned him. Nope, hadn't concerned him a bit until he'd started noticing him *physically*. And even then he'd tried to write it off. So what if when he called Eddie cute, he'd started to linger on the thought? Started to think about how he kind of liked the way Eddie's hair looked when he ran a hand through it just to mess it up. How Eddie's eyes were really brown, and really big, and always really bright when he was laughing at something Richie had said. How Eddie fit kinda nice under his arm when they were walking or watching movies at the Aladdin Theater.

Yeah, he'd tried real hard to convince himself that those thoughts were normal. That his thoughts couldn't be too queer if he still thought girls were pretty.

And that was the thing- Richie really did think girls were pretty.

But he didn't want to mess up there hair like he did Eddie's, and he didn't want to make them laugh just to see their eyes light up, and he didn't care about how they'd fit under his arm.

He wasn't falling in love with them.

But you bet your fur, he was falling damn hard for Eddie Kaspbrak.

He'd finally accepted that, at least in his head. He knew better than to ever act on it. He already had a face that tempted people to punch him, he didn't need to give them a reason to kill him.

As the teens laughter died down Beverly looked over at Richie, a look of sincerity on her face that was probably brought on by the finality of their situation and a fair amount of alcohol. "Someone is going to be so lucky to have you someday, Richie."

Richie smiled, but it was a painful smile. The kind that came when

you were in danger of spilling your guts about how sad you really were. Because he couldn't stop himself from thinking about how that someone could never be Eddie, even if he wasn't leaving Derry.

Sometimes Richie told himself he could never be with Eddie because the other boy didn't like him that way. Why would he? Richie was a four-eyed freak who annoyed anyone who sat with him in a room for too long, and that was before taking his genitals into consideration.

But that was the easy reason.

The harder reason involved looking at the facts.

It meant noticing how Eddie always sat next to him at the movies, listening to his commentary and letting Richie's arm rest over his shoulders. It was feeling the way their hands 'accidently' bumped and kicking each other's legs teasingly as they read the same funny-book. It was listening to Eddie sing Richie's favorite rock songs under his breath a day after they'd listened to them on the radio together.

It was realizing that Eddie just might love him too, and yet still knowing that telling him would be the cruellest thing he could ever do to him.

Because they could never really be together even if they wanted to. It would always have to be a secret, something to hide and be ashamed of. And Richie didn't want to be ashamed.

Especially not when it was easy for Richie to hide his feelings in plain sight. To tease Eddie constantly, pinching his cheeks and sometimes even kissing them. And even though that sometimes didn't feel like enough, like when he was lying up at night wondering if Eddie's lips would feel as soft as his cheeks always did, he knew he was lucky to have it. To get away with it.

Richie knew when he got called a faggot at school, no one actually meant that they thought he was queer. They thought he was annoying and weird, but not queer. Richie was over-the-top and always doing something strange, so he could call another guy cute and pinch his cheeks and no one thought too deeply about it. That was lucky.

Eddie wasn't as lucky. When the people called him a girlyboy, a queer, a *fucking* fairy, they were just waiting for the sign. The final nail in the coffin that would show without a doubt that, yes, Eddie Kaspbrak was a flaming homosexual. So Eddie was careful. Eddie yelled at him and pushed him away when he was too close. Eddie refused to let anyone outside of the losers see him enjoying the closeness of another male.

But still, sometimes Richie saw it. Even when Eddie was trying to hide it from him, he still saw bits and pieces of it.

To tell Eddie he loved him- it could lead to the end. A single slip-up and everything could go wrong.

So Richie did nothing. Because sometimes the kindest thing you can do for someone you love is to eat it. To stuff your feelings down deep and never say them out loud, even though your heart is beating in your chest like a drum in a rock song.

"Yeah, Bevvie, someone's going to be lucky to have you, too," Richie said instead of slurring out the bubbling love confession he'd had shoved down his throat for months.

Bev moved to hold his hand then, and Richie laced their fingers together easily. He wondered what his life would be like if he'd fallen in love with Beverly instead. He wondered if leaving would still hurt so much.

He wondered how it would feel to be lying in the grass holding Eds' hand.

"I have to go home soon," Beverly said sadly, staring up at the almost full moon, not meeting Richie's moist eyes with her own.

"I'll walk the lady," Richie said in his mobster voice, a voice that needed work on its best days and was even worse with the influence of alcohol.

Making it to Beverly's house was a feat, but luckily it was one filled with as much laughter as disaster. Upon standing up, the alcohol had suddenly felt even stronger and the two teens had had to cling to

each other to keep from falling down every few steps. They'd only made it halfway to Beverly's street when they'd had to stop so she could puke, and Richie had barely managed to keep his own bile down upon smelling hers. But somehow they had made it to the yard across the street from Beverly's house, and standing facing each other was sobering them up as much as anything could sober up two thirteen year olds in their condition.

"I'm gonna miss you so much, Richie." Beverly wrapped her arms around Richie, squeezing him tightly, tears running onto his shoulder.

"Now don't cry missus' I says, don't cry! Nobody looks lovely when they cry, crumpet!" Richie cooed in a voice that couldn't decide if it was an old Scottish woman or an old British man.

"Beep beep, Richie," Beverly managed between tears.

Finally Richie let out a shaky noise. "Fuck, I know, Bevvie." And then they cried together, holding each other tight enough to leave bruises.

When they pulled away, they each wiped their own tears, and then took a step back from each other that was both painful and necessary.

"Promise you'll write, Richie." Beverly all but demanded.

Richie smiled tightly as he thought of Stan and of the letters he'd never received. "I'll write you as many as I can," Richie said, hoping that he would be able to send even one. "Tell everyone... Tell everyone I'll miss them. And Eds, tell him... Just promise to call him Eds for me every once in a while. So he won't forget me."

Beverly gave him a weird smile that he didn't have time to analyze before she burst into laughter. "No one could ever forget you Trashmouth. None of us. Even if we wanted to."

"I love you, Bevvie," Richie said, alcohol pulling words from the edge of his tongue.

"I love you too, Richie," Beverly said before taking a deep breath. "But I have to go now before I really do run away with you."

"That offer always stands," Richie told her before motioning her off toward her door.

He watched her stumble across the street and then turn graceful as soon as she hit the dead grass around her building. She entered quietly, and when no lights came on and no screaming was heard, Richie took off back to his house, suddenly feeling alone for the first time since that summer when they'd all come together.

## 2. Chapter 2

### Scorpion Grasses: Part 2

**Author's Note: Sorry this took so long, but it got kind of out of control as far as length. This fic was actually going to only be two parts, but now it's going to be three. Although the next part should be pretty short. Anyway, let me know what you think of this!**

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The trip back to his house was filled with his own voice or, more accurately, voices. When he stumbled the Irish cop would come out, calling him a drunk and threatening arrest. When he felt like he was going too fast, his sportscaster voice came out, announcing his record setting speed.

He couldn't acknowledge it, perhaps due to inebriation or more likely due to his own fear, but he was preparing himself for being lonely again. For having to make his own voices just to have people to talk to. It was unfortunate, but also something he could do naturally.

When he got back to his house, he went to the window he'd left cracked opened, leading to the dining room. He opened it as gently as he could and pulled himself in through the opening, making a light thud on the floor as he barely caught himself before making a full body fall.

He stood in the dining room in silence for a moment, waiting to see if his parents would hear him sneaking in and come to investigate the noise he had made. However, for one of the few times in his short life, he was lucky and his parents didn't hear him.

He made his way up the stairs to his bedroom, stopping every few steps to listen for his parents, but in the end he made it to his room without any disturbance.

It was once he was inside that he got a surprise.

Because sitting on his bed, flashlight in hand, was Eddie Kaspbrak.

Richie thought maybe he was hallucinating. "Eddie?"

"I don't know how your parents didn't hear you stomping around like that. You should be getting your ass beat right now, numbnuts," Eddie chastised, looking at his feet, and sounding the least bit sad.

Richie didn't catch on to any sadness.

"Eds!" Richie called a bit too loudly before going over to the smaller boy, intending to sit beside him, but instead falling over him.

For a moment they were tangled together, flashlight falling to the carpet. Eddie wiggled beneath Richie, attempting to push the taller boy off, but Richie only wrapped him in a tight hug before kissing each of his cheeks, leaving loud smacks behind.

"Richie, stop it, I hate that!" Eddie hissed.

"I didn't think you were comin' to see me off Eds," Richie said before burying his face in Eddie's neck. He took a deep breath and was immediately met with the strong smell of rubbing alcohol. Eddie's mother must have given him a rub down before sending him to bed. "You smell like a hospital."

Eddie wiggled against him again before stilling. "Well, don't smell me then. And don't call me Eds."

Richie laughed, wrapping himself even tighter around Eddie. He was 13 and drunk and the boy he was in love with had been waiting for him on his bed; suddenly the night wasn't so bad.

"I had to sneak out after my mom fell asleep... I guess I missed the booze?" Eddie asked, the word 'booze' coming out in a softer voice.

Richie quickly raised up, his face mere inches from Eddie's, looking pale and strange in the shadows created by the flashlight shining up from the floor. "Ah, Eds, it was great. Me and Bevvie got so drunk. We went all over town with a bottle of wine. I'm still drunk."

Eddie's scrunched face showed that he hadn't needed Richie's admission to figure that out; Richie's breath reeked of the sweet wine he and Beverly had been sharing.

"Sorry I missed it," Eddie said not sounding or actually being sorry.

"I know a way you could still get a taste," Richie teased, flicking his tongue, almost hitting Eddie's nose with it.

"Ugh, Richie, cut it out," Eddie demanded trying to move his face away from Richie's.

Richie did cut it out, but only because he was laughing. Laughing because Eddie was *there* and, oh man, he liked Eddie so much.

"Geez, just how drunk are you? You know alcohol poisoning is a thing, right?" Eddie asked, suddenly looking at Richie with fear in his gaze.

Richie finally stopped laughing and looked at Eddie with a dopey grin on his face. It might have been selfish, but then Richie was 13 and sometimes 13 year olds could be selfish, but he liked it when Eddie worried about him.

"You sound like your mom," Richie said, receiving a scowl from the boy lying under him. "You don't have to worry. I feel good, warm. You're here."

Richie lies his face back into Eddie's neck just in time to feel the bob of the other boy's Adam's apple.

"My mom would be taking me to the hospital to get my stomach pumped if she found me drunk." His voice sounded tight, like it would crack in the middle of the thought. A second later he managed to pull his aspirator out of his side pocket to take a puff.

"Eddie gets off a good one," Richie said into Eddie's neck, laughing against the soft skin there. A second later he felt Eddie's body shiver, but the voices were quiet. He's quiet.

For perhaps the first time since they met it's like that. Just the sound of breathing between them as they lay together, effectively cuddling. Normally Richie would have broken a moment like the one they were having, a moment so intimate that it was dangerous. But his stomach was full of red wine and his heart was full of love and his arms were full of Eddie, and all of these things together felt too good to let go.

His brain was no longer reminding him that he was shoeing a line, or if it was, it was being ignored in favor of other happier thoughts. The kind of happy in love teenager thoughts that Richie never let himself linger on for too long.

He wasn't thinking about how cruel it was to lie in their position when he and Eddie couldn't ever be together. He was thinking about how soft Eddie's skin was, even with the occasional dry patch from too much scrubbing. He was thinking about how even though Eddie smelled like rubbing alcohol, he didn't want to be smelling anything else.

He had a series of disjointed thoughts where he supposed love was like that. When you loved someone you took comfort in that smell that was theirs, even if that smell wasn't particularly good. Whether it was perfume or aftershave, sweat from work or horseshit from being in the barn, when you loved someone that smell was okay. Hell, that smell was even good.

Perhaps Richie should ask Sonia Kaspbrak for his own rubdown. Or Eddie. He wouldn't mind a rubdown from Eddie.

"I hate this."

Richie had been so engrossed in his own feelings and thoughts that the words startled him, and for a moment he felt guilty because he was sure Eddie was talking about their position and about the things Richie had been thinking.

But then he moved so that he could look at Eddie's face, and as he looked at large brown eyes, glossed over with tears, he remembered that he was leaving tomorrow. Eddie didn't hate what was happening, he hated that this would be the only time for it.

Suddenly Richie's stomach was full of rocks and his own eyes started to water.

"I know."

Eddie shook his head, tears falling from his eyes before he took a puff from his aspirator. Then in a pained voice he whispered, "Stan never

wrote to us."

Richie went rigid even though he had been thinking about that same thing earlier in the night with Bev. It was different hearing someone else say what he had been thinking for so long. More than that, he suddenly realized that maybe all of them had come to the same conclusion and just refused to talk about it.

"And I know he wanted to. I *know* he did. He was scared but he loved us," Eddie said as though he was confessing an awful secret. "He didn't write because he couldn't. He-he forgot us, Richie. What happened in the sewers... *Something* happened in the sewers. I don't always remember what, but I know it scared the shit out of us. I know the farther away I go from where it happened the less I remember. And Stan left Derry. Stan doesn't remember what happened. He doesn't remember *us*."

Richie knew all of that. He'd put it together a long time ago just like Eddie must have. Just like Bev and Mike and Bill and Ben must have. But hearing it put into words made it worse. It made it real. Richie knew he wouldn't be able to write his friends, knew he wouldn't talk to them again. But he'd tried so hard not to think about how he wouldn't be able to remember them.

He thought of the last times he'd seen each of his friends.

He remembered two days ago, riding double with Bill all over town, Bill's legs almost long enough now to reach the pedals comfortably while sitting on the seat. They'd gone everywhere, wind in their hair, Richie yelling warnings at anyone who came too close to them. It'd been a day of running away from the world until it'd got dark and they'd had to stop to say goodbye. He remembered shaking Bill's hand, wanting to thank him for everything he'd ever done for him, but instead telling him they really were adults now. More than that, he remembered going two steps before Bill uttered without a trace of a stutter, '*Adults are stupid.*' And then he'd turned around to meet Bill halfway and they'd hugged for a long time.

He remembered yesterday when Mike had taken him fishing for the first time saying, '*Sometimes a man has to take the time to go fishing.*' Richie had never really been the fishing type, too much sitting and

not enough screaming, but with Mike he'd had fun.

He'd come up with voices for the worms and the fish, and enough jokes to keep them both cackling. And Mike had been patient, obviously caring more about spending time together than actually teaching Richie to be a competent fisher. At the end of the day, Mike had kept the fish and their last interaction had happened with Mike holding his shoulder.

*'I'm gonna miss you, Richie. But I'll see you next time.'* Richie had felt a cold shiver down his spine, the fleeting thought of the promise he'd made swept through his mind. Then he'd been the one to hug Mike, needing to feel the comfort only a true friend could provide.

*'I'll be there, Mikey. I already can't wait to see all your dumb faces again.'* Mike had hugged him harder. Maybe he'd been even more scared than Richie.

He remembered early that morning, seeing Bev, Ben, and Eddie all at the same time. He and Bev had gone through half a pack of cigarettes before noon, which was the time Bev had had to sneak off to beat her father home. But before she'd left the park they were hanging around at, she'd kissed his cheek and promised she'd see him later that night. With Bev it'd been easier to let her go because he knew it wasn't the last time.

Eddie and Ben were harder. They'd caught a matinee at the Aladdin, an action movie that they'd gotten kicked out of for talking louder than the explosions had boomed. After that they had walked around town, just talking, the air stifling with its sadness.

Eddie had left at three in the afternoon to meet his mother to go for his monthly checkup. He'd been shaking when he'd said goodbye to Richie, and his eyes- fuck so big and brown and pretty- had made it clear that he had something he wanted to say that he couldn't quite voice. Richie had wanted to ask, just like he'd wanted to kiss him, but he hadn't because he'd been just as scared.

Instead Eddie had hugged him tightly, head buried in the crook of his neck and shoulder. *'Every time I think you can't get cuter'* Richie hadn't finished that thought, because Eddie had pulled away and shoved

him. '*Get bent, Trashmouth.*' Wobbling words, and once again brown eyes that had something to say. Instead he'd said bye in the quietest voice Richie had ever heard from him.

And then Richie had sent him off with a kiss on the cheek, turning into the Southern Bell sending her husband into war, '*Write me every day, my love! I'll wait for you!*' Eddie hadn't turned to look back. But his shoulders had shaken and his aspirator went to his mouth twice before he turned down the next street. He'd been crying and Richie had wanted to go after him.

At that moment more than any other he'd wanted to throw a tantrum at his parents, scream about how they weren't being fair. He wanted to refuse to move, to see his friends every day, and to be able to hold hands with Eddie Kaspbrak and stay with him forever, and have no one judge him for it. In short, he wanted to be a child with agency and control over his own life.

But those things weren't for children, so instead Richie had watched Eddie go before falling against Ben. He'd wanted badly for Ben to somehow kill the heavy feeling in his chest and eyes, or to at least help him forget it for a while. But Ben was too sensitive for his own good. He'd wrapped an arm around Richie and asked if he was okay and Richie had immediately began sobbing. '*No, Haystack, fuck this noise! This is bullshit!*' And so Haystack had held him awkwardly as he'd cried in the middle of the sidewalk.

When he'd finally stopped and had said every curse word he knew in frustration, Ben had asked if he'd wanted to talk about it. Richie had made it clear that it not only had never happened, but that Ben needed to make him happy right that second or he'd start screaming at the people on the street who were '*NOT MINDING THEIR FUCKING BUSINESS!*' People had snapped their heads away from the two boys and Ben had immediately led Richie to the newly opened Derry Bowling Alley.

There Richie had taken his anger out on the white pins while Ben had gotten them each one of the greasy double cheeseburgers that the alley had become famous for within a week of its existence. They'd eaten and then they had bowled a game together, which by the end of Richie had begun laughing and joking again.

And then after that they'd bowled another, with Richie trying to attempt bowling tricks, including bowling backwards, bowling with his not dominate hand, and bowling with his eyes closed (this trick had led to a strike, but in the lane next to them). Ben, on the other hand, bowled carefully, calculating where he should aim and lining up his throw before sending the bowl gently down the polished ally.

At the end of the game neither of them had bowled over 100 points, but they were having fun, encouraging each other and not afraid to laugh at the 20 year olds who were glaring at them, because they were too young to be fully *adult*, but too old to beat them up for being annoying.

They had stayed until eight o'clock when Ben had had to call it a night saying, *'I wish I could sneak out with you guys, but with my aunt and cousin in town I'd never get away with it.'*

Richie had understood. *'It's okay, Ben, you really had my back today. I'm usually so damn cool.'* They'd both laughed at that and then Richie had hugged Ben goodbye because, *'What the fuck, man. I'm pretty sure I snotted up your shirt earlier.'* Ben had only laughed.

Well, at first he'd only laughed. Then he'd cried a bit and Richie had made fun of him as though he hadn't cried like a baby a few hours earlier in the middle of a busy sidewalk. But he'd wiped Ben's tears for him with the heels of his hands, getting close enough to make Ben laugh, if only to keep himself from crying a second time that day (at the time he hadn't realized he'd be crying again later in the night, although in retrospect he *should* have known). They'd finally parted from one another, leaving Riche alone to go on an alcohol stealing mission.

The last person he remembered was Stan.

That last day with Stan felt like so long ago, it was like looking at an old photograph. But just as if he was looking at a photograph he saw every detail in perfect clarity.

He remembered them sitting in Stan's room, only a couple of boxes left to move, staring down at the carpeted floor. *'You're not gonna be some asswipe who doesn't call right? Replace me with someone else on the*

*first day?' Richie had joked although he'd had a bad feeling even then.*

*'Please, Richie, listening to you bitch is what I do with 85 percent of my free time. I wouldn't know what to do if I could actually enjoy myself for once.'* Richie had shoved him softly and Stan had shoved him back, both of them laughing.

*'I wish you weren't leaving.'* Richie had said in a rare moment of honestly. It was probably that moment that made Stan's next statement possible. *'I know. I hate leaving you guys,'* then he had trailed into the Honest thought. *'But maybe I won't have the nightmares anymore if I'm not here. I... I can't take the nightmares anymore, Richie.'* Richie had frowned but had also nodded. He'd known how bad they were.

Then Stan's parents had called him to tell him that it was time to finish packing up and for Richie to leave. They'd stood and Stan had walked him to the front door and things had felt so terribly final. *'I'll talk to you later, Stan my man.'* Richie had said while smiling.

He hadn't been referencing the promise they'd made, but Stan's face had pinched up in remembrance. Then he'd hugged Richie harder than he ever had before. *'Please don't be too stupid without me. Please learn to think before you speak, even if it's just once in a while. Find a way to be as happy as we were when we all first came together. And for fucks sake, please either get good at your voices or stop doing them.'* The words were kind, but they had filled Richie with fear. The kind of fear that people don't usually get to feel, because usually when you talk to someone for the last time you don't realize it's the last time.

Silent tears had rolled down Richie's face as Stan had pulled away. *'Stan... Please.'* It'd sounded so broken coming from Richie's trashmouth.

Stan had told him simply that it'd be okay, but his confident words had been betrayed by his doubtful eyes. Then Stan's father had come into view and Richie had been gently nudged out of the house and out of Stan's life.

"Maybe he's lucky he doesn't remember," Richie said as he thought of Stan.

Richie couldn't help but remember the nightmares. Nightmares that had slowly been breaking Stan since that summer when they all came together. Stan's under-eyes had become a permanent puffy purple, and his eyes were always darting around like he was afraid something would be there waiting to come after him. So many days where Stan had showed up to his house at dawn, having woken from a nightmare and not slept the rest of the night.

Mostly Stan didn't go into detail about what he dreamed, but once he had. Once Richie had come to Stan's house only to find that the other boy hadn't slept in three days. Stan had been shaking, reading his bird book, muttering facts to himself in a way that made it look like he was a step away from losing his sanity. Richie had joked but it hadn't been funny. But Stan hadn't pointed that out.

Instead he had seen the fear that hid under Richie's forced smile and he'd started crying. *'Why am I the only one who sees It? We were all there, why is it just me? I just want to forget It, Richie. I want to forget all of it.'* Richie had consoled Stan the best he could that day and every day after it. But there was only so much he could do. Only so many nights he could spend at Stan's, lying awake ready to wake his friend up at the slightest whimper.

But now Richie would bet that he didn't dream about things that happened in the sewer. Now Stan probably slept all night and wasn't always looking over his shoulder. Maybe now Stan was happy.

"Do you really believe that?" Eddie's voice was soft and hurt. For a second when Richie looked at him, he saw the boy that Eddie's mother must have seen every day when she looked at him. He looked fragile, like if Richie answered wrong his face would break into pieces.

But then Eddie pushed against him, harder than Richie thought he could push, until Richie was off of him. Then he sat up straight on the bed, staring down at Richie with hurt, angry eyes. "Do you? Do you think it'd be better if we all forgot each other as long as we forgot what happened, too?"

Looking up at Eddie's pinched face, he immediately thought, No. No, forgetting wouldn't be better. Because forgetting meant losing his

best friends. It meant not remembering how sure everything felt when Bill had an idea or what seeing Mike's excited face on the first day of spring looked like. It was forgetting the smell of Winston's and Marlboro's mixing together when Richie and Bev had been lucky enough to each score their favorite brand of cigarette. It was losing the sound of Ben laughing in earnest at a joke of his that no one else had found funny. It was not being able to remember a time where Stan had been with them. It was finally holding the boy he loved and knowing that in a week he wouldn't be able to recall who that boy was, or maybe even that there had ever been one.

"No," Richie said as he slowly sat up beside Eddie, their knees brushing. "I never want to forget you. Even if there are some places in town that make me want to piss myself, and I don't remember why. I could live with that if it mean staying with you guys. But, Stan..."

"He got it worse than we did," Eddie said looking down at the knees he had folded against his chest. "I don't remember it... But he had to have."

"The nightmares were so bad, Eds. I know you saw him, too, but I think they were even worse than what he said. I think he was trying to hide the worst of it." Richie thought back to the day he'd seen Stan cry. He wondered how many times he'd cried alone.

"It would have been okay if we were together," Eddie said, sounding as sure as he did when he was telling one of them what was wrong with their bike or what the quickest route to the candy store was from their location. "If all seven of us had been. Did you ever notice we were never all together again?"

Yeah, Richie had noticed. It would have been impossible not to. Because when all seven of them were together in one place they may as well have been an entire army; they were invincible and powerful and no one could stop them.

Five or six of them was good. Even two was better than one. But there wasn't the same energy as there was when there was seven. With seven they were complete and humming with power. Any less and they were just children who'd gone through a horrible thing.

"Yeah, no matter what we did or when there was always someone who couldn't be there," Richie agreed.

"When we aren't all together—"

"We're just kids," Richie finished for him

"Yeah." Eddie leaned back against the wall that Richie's bed was pressed against and then let out a shaky breath before more tears sprang to his eyes.

"Eds—"

"My mom is looking at houses," Eddie said quickly before Richie could finish his thought.

"What?" Richie asked, not because he didn't understand but because the announcement was so sudden.

"She doesn't know I know, but the real-estate guy called when she was in the shower one day," Eddie explained as he wiped desperately at his eyes. "I didn't tell anyone because you'd already told us you were leaving and I didn't want to take the focus off of you."

"Eds, fuck's sake, I would have *shared* the focus. I'm not that big of a dick, despite what your mother might say after a night with me," Richie joked. He knew it wasn't the time for it, but he couldn't help it. He couldn't think of anything else to say, and saying nothing felt like an even bigger failure.

"It doesn't matter," Eddie said, sounding like he hadn't even heard Richie's comment. "I'm going to forget anything anyone says to me. I won't remember any of you. *I hate it.*"

Eddie had tears rolling down his face and his voice was shaking, but the determination in his eyes stopped Richie from interrupting him.

"I was *finally* brave, Richie," Eddie said brokenly. "I spent my whole life not knowing what it was like to get hurt or take risks or do anything important. And then that summer came and suddenly I did all of it. I fought *something*, I went into the sewers, I got my arm broken, and it all hurt, and I was scared shitless, but I did it anyway.

I did it for Bill and for you guys and for myself."

Richie reached out and took Eddie's hand in his, not knowing what else to do. Eddie squeezed it tight as he continued.

"You know I actually used to think love was what my mother did?" Eddie asked before laughing bitterly. "I thought love was when she wouldn't let me go outside when it was snowing because I might get sick, or when she told me I could just stay inside with her because the neighbors were mowing grass and I'd probably just get hives or an asthma attack before I could make it anywhere anyway. But then I was with you guys. And love... Love doesn't *suffocate* you. It doesn't make you feel like you're choking all the time. It's *nice*. It made me feel like I belonged somewhere and like I could be brave. Before we were all together, I'd *never* been brave, Richie. I'd never had the chance to be. I'm terrified of losing that. I'm so scared of going back to who I was before."

Eddie paused then, and for a moment Richie thought he'd said what he needed to say. But then Eddie had looked him in the eye so intently that he almost couldn't return the gaze.

"But right now, I'm still brave, Richie. I swear I still am. Even if this is the last time, I am." Eddie moved their hands then. Instead of being cupped together tightly, he laced their fingers gently. "I want to kiss you."

Richie's stomach felt like it was falling in on itself. Suddenly he was too hot and felt sweat forming on his forehead. For a second he almost couldn't place the feeling because the circumstances making him feel it were so foreign to what usually caused it. But then it hit him; he was scared.

Scared to kiss a boy, scared to tell that boy that he loved him. For so long he'd been eating his feelings, holding them back from scrutiny. And he'd told himself it was for Eddie—And in part it probably was. But it was also for Richie. So much for Richie. Because he was afraid of what would happen if he laced his fingers with Eddie's and told him that he wanted to kiss him.

Richie looked down at their joined hands and then up again into

sure, calm brown eyes. He didn't know if the thing that came next was a realization or a memory, but he understood all at once how brave Eddie Kaspbrak was. How even if Richie couldn't do it, Eddie could. Eddie had fought and Eddie was willing to keep fighting, whether in the sewers or in Richie's dark room.

"You're a hell of a lot braver than I am, Eds."

It might have sounded like a rejection, but Richie gripped Eddie's hand hard and his blue eyes looked into Eddie's brown, begging, *kiss me kiss me kiss me*.

Eddie didn't hesitate. With his free hand he grabbed Richie's cheek and pulled him in until their lips met.

It wasn't fireworks but it was some kind of warm explosion as Eddie pulled him in hard, their noses bumping awkwardly as they slid into their first kiss.

When Eddie pulled away, Richie looked after his lips desperately, and when Eddie leaned in again he was wasn't sure if it was because he'd seen or because he also felt like it hadn't been enough.

They weren't good kisses in a technical sense. They were clumsy, closed mouthed pecks—but to a 13 year old, it was the epitome of kissing. The three kisses Eddie gave Richie were enough to set his skin ablaze and make the voices within him nothing but a buzz of noise.

Yowza, was kissing wild, or what?

When Eddie finally pulled away he didn't remove his hand from Richie's cheek. He left it there, thumb stroking Richie's cheekbone.

He looked solemn to Richie, and it scared him because that wasn't how he was feeling at all. He was *happy*. He was grinning, because he'd been too scared to lean in, but Eddie hadn't been and it'd felt so *good*. So why didn't Eddie look happy, too?

"You're the only boy I'll ever kiss," Eddie said quietly, in a voice that left little room for doubt.

"That's romantic as hell," Richie said, although Eddie's tone had made the statement anything but romantic.

"I'm not promising to only kiss you for the rest of my life. I can't," Eddie said, that last bit sounding romantic to Richie if only because he got the feeling that maybe if Eddie could then he would. "I'm just realizing that after I leave Derry I'm never going to be brave enough to do this again."

"You can always kiss Bill before you leave." The sentence flew out of Richie before he had a chance to review it. He was always doing that; letting a thought flow without really realizing what he was saying.

"I'm not going to kiss Bill," Eddie said in a voice that almost sounded offended.

"Yeah, don't feel bad," Richie said with a squeeze to the hand he was still holding. "He's out of my league too."

Eddie laughed then, a sound so clear and pretty to Richie, that had he not already been in love with him, it would have been the moment that he fell in love with Eddie.

After he'd stopped laughing Eddie looked at Richie, a small smile on his face before he opened his mouth to speak, sounding much less grave than he had before. "I just know I'm going to go right back to being afraid that kissing a boy will make me sick. It sucks ass."

Richie knew it did. He didn't think he'd ever kiss another boy either. But at the moment that wasn't an issue, because there was only one boy that he wanted to kiss.

"Then just keep kissing me," Richie said simply.

Eddie didn't argue.

They became a mess of lips, teeth, and teenage inexperience. They bumped against each other clumsily, strange angles and heavy breathing mixed with fits of giggles when one of them did something remarkably wrong.

They started with lingering closed mouth kisses, where they smiled

too much to have their lips fit together correctly. Gradually they moved on to open mouthed ones, featuring lips parted too wide and spit dripping down Richie's chin. They'd laughed into each other's shoulders even as Richie had asked Eddie about how many germs were swimming down his face. When they'd kissed again Eddie was paid back for his slobbering by having his bottom lip cut open by Richie's buck teeth, as the taller boy attempted a move he'd seen in a movie. The only thing that saved the moment was Richie licking softly at the split in Eddie's lip, an action that was somehow disgustingly gross as well as incredibly tender.

They kissed for hours off and on. Slow and fast, silly and passionate, lazy and frantic, as they tried to fit a lifetime's worth of kisses into the time they had left before the sun came up. In that time they found that Richie liked his hair tugged, that Eddie didn't mind, and maybe even enjoyed, Richie's hand in his back pocket, and that kissing was so much more *fun* than movies made it out to be.

But eventually the first light of day shined into the room, just as Richie yawned into Eddie's open mouth.

"That's so gross," Eddie complained, his words betrayed by the happy lilt to his voice.

"Almost as gross as a guy slobbering down your chin," Richie countered, not even a little ashamed at having yawned a smoke and wine filled mixture into Eddie's mouth.

Eddie leaned forward and nipped playfully at Richie's chin, making the taller boy snort. "Fuck off, man. You liked it."

"Yeah, Eds, love it when you spit on me, baby," Richie said before nuzzling his cheek against Eddie's. He wanted to kiss more, but, *damn*, who knew that lips could get so sore and tingly?

Eddie laughed at the affection even as he pulled Richie's face away by his hair- a move that totally didn't make Richie hum in pleasure.

Once Eddie had parted them, he looked at Richie in a way that made the taller boy's stomach drop.

"The sun's coming up... I have to head back home before your parents catch us or my mom realizes I'm gone."

If Richie had a filter or an appropriate level of shame, he wouldn't have immediately clung to Eddie, begging into his neck, "Stay. Just a while longer. My parents won't be up for another hour or two. Stay. Please stay."

"Fuck, Rich, you know I want to. But I have to go sometime."

Richie couldn't see Eddie from his place against his neck, but he could hear by his tone that Eddie was near tears at the thought of leaving. He wasn't being fair. But nothing about the situation was fair.

"Why not stay 'til my parents catch us? Will they even remember catching us?" Richie asked, so much bitterness flooding into his voice. He didn't want to move. Not now. Not when Eddie was brave enough to love him.

"I don't know, Richie." Eddie was crying.

Richie raised up and began wiping the tears away without a second thought, as though if he couldn't see them then they weren't there. "Come on, Eds, fuck, don't cry. Please don't."

Eddie caught his wrists and pulled them down. "I love you so damn much. I'm going to remember that when you leave today, okay? That's the only thing I know for sure. And I don't want to be worrying about you because your dumbass convinced me to let your parents catch us."

"You love me?" Richie's heart might have exploded, beautiful fireworks in his chest at the admission.

"I know, I was surprised too," Eddie joked, as tears finally stopped falling.

"God, Eds gets off a good one," Richie kissed him hard despite his swollen lips. "My boy is so funny. That's why I fell in love with you, ya know? You're only one in Derry who could keep up. And, man, you being so cute never hurt."

For once Eddie didn't fight it when Richie pinched his cheek, just rolled his eyes even as his ears turned red. Richie could have looked at him forever. He wanted to.

"I know you have to go," Richie finally said once he'd released Eddie's cheek.

Eddie nodded as he sat up on the bed and stretched out his short body. "I wish I didn't," Eddie said as he moved to pick up the dead flashlight from the floor. He had no idea when exactly the batteries had died.

"I wish I didn't have to either," Richie said as he sat up on his bed.

Eddie smiled, but Richie could tell it was forced. "Hey, Derry's not big enough for you anyway. It's good that you're getting out."

"Yeah," Richie agreed halfheartedly. "It'll be better when I'm seeing you again."

Eddie stopped for a moment looking deep in thought before he said, "25 years at the most, right? Until I see you next?" He sounded confused, but only by how sure he was of the statement.

Richie nodded. "25 years at most. But feel free to find me before then, Eds."

"I hope I do," Eddie said before he bent down and kissed one of Richie's cheeks. "And maybe by then you'll stop calling me Eds."

"I wouldn't count on it." Richie winked at Eddie before the smaller boy made his way out of Richie's house through his bedroom window, a path that Richie had ruled out for himself earlier in the night.

He watched Eddie walk away until he was completely out of view, then slumped down, tired but unable to fathom sleeping. He sat staring at the empty space where he had last seen Eddie before an idea finally struck him.

Richie stood up so quickly that he ended up having to lean out his window to expel the alcohol from his body. Once he finished with

that, so extremely thankful that Eddie's last view of him hadn't included the sight of him blowing chunks down the side of his house, he went on a hunt to find paper and the pen he wanted among the packed up boxes left in his house.

Once he found what he needed he wrote two letters. One was addressed for Bill Denbrough's house and had a greeting addressed to the Losers' Club -2, and the other was addressed solely to Eddie. Once he'd written the letters he'd finally allowed himself to fall asleep, only to be woken up what felt like minutes later.

He pestered his parents all morning as they loaded up the car, to take him to the post office before they left town. They did as he requested, if for no reason other than because he was acting civil. The last few days the only conversation Richie had held with either of his parents was the one where he asked them not to move and then got angry when they told him the decision was final.

So Richie mailed his letters and then fell asleep in the backseat of the car, thoughts of Eddie completely filling his mind.

He wouldn't wake up for hours, and when he did, his father was asking if they were on good enough terms for him to buy Richie a burger or was Richie still too upset about the move? And it was a funny thing because Richie couldn't really remember why he'd been so mad about leaving Derry. Derry kind of sucked.

So he ate his burger and the closest he got to thinking about Eddie Kaspbrak was wondering why his lips were so puffy.

### 3. Chapter 3

#### Scorpion Grasses: Part 3

Author's Note: Me, says part 3 will be short. Also me, makes part 3 the longest chapter. Oh well, what can I say? I got a little carried away because I love Eddie. Anyway, this was a blast to write. Please let me know what you think! Also, I keep forgetting to mention that Scorpion Grasses are another name for Forget-Me-Nots (pretty blue flowers), which is where our title comes from. Oh, also this post marks me hitting over 500,000 words of fic on this site B)

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Richie had only been gone for four days when Eddie's mother declared that it was bill day. Bill day, despite the fun sounding name (a day just for Big Bill? Sign Eddie up), was actually comprised of the three most boring hours of Eddie's month.

The day was poorly disguised by Sonia Kaspbrak as a chance for mother/son bonding, which also served to teach Eddie a valuable life skill. In reality, Sonia was just too vain to admit that she needed glasses and couldn't see the numbers on the bills anymore. Thus Eddie became her eyes.

So once a month she and Eddie sat down together, and Sonia walked him through the bill paying process and then balancing the checkbook. It was a task so boring that the 13 year old could cry. It also made him think of Stan, which also made him want to cry because Stan *wasn't* boring, and Eddie missed him.

Sonia Kaspbrak was already seated at the kitchen table when she sent Eddie outside to check the mail for any late bills (Eddie's mother would complain for 20 minutes if there were any because 'If those people expect to be paid they should have the decency to send the bill out on time. Don't they care about punctuality? Eddie, you know how important it is to be punctual, don't you? Of course you do, you're mommy's good boy.').

As Eddie pulled the few pieces of mail out of the mailbox he stewed.

Each day since Richie had gone Eddie had become more and more irritable towards his mother. Rationally he knew it wasn't her fault that Richie had moved, but he also knew that she was planning to take him away and didn't even have the guts to tell him. Of course, even if she wasn't secretly planning a move he still would have been mad at her simply because she was an adult and a parent, *and why did adults never care what their children wanted?*

Eddie barely scanned the mail as he walked back into the house, too busy trying to think of a way to get away from his mother. It was purely chance that as he entered the kitchen he happened to see his name on an envelope in Richie's messy scrawl. His hand moved seemingly without his thoughts as he shoved the envelope deep into his pocket.

His mother looked up, hearing the sound. Her eyes were bad, but her hearing was good.

"What was that, Eddie?" She asked, suspicious of him instantly.

"Nothing, Mama. Just the new Highlight's," Eddie said as casually as possible before he went to the table and sat down next to her, his arm brushing hers.

A few minutes ago he was as close to hating her as he'd ever been, but now he just needed to keep the letter in his pocket to himself. So he did what he'd taken to doing since the end of the summer where the losers got together.

He sat close to her and laid his head on her shoulder and then looked up at her with wide, innocent eyes, "Can you explain how to do this again? I kind of forgot."

In his eyes and voice and body language he made sure he said what she wanted to hear. He said, *Momma, please help me with this very difficult thing. I'm just a boy after all, your little boy. I need your help with everything I do- I always will. I love you so much. I doubt I could ever function without you here taking care of me. I've very fragile, and sometimes it's like I can hardly wipe my own ass without you, Ma.*

Some days he did it to throw her a bone, others it was in an

exchange. Today it was an exchange. Three hours where he pretended he was solely dependent on her in exchange for her pretending she didn't know he was hiding something in his pocket.

As usual she looked at him, considering him and perhaps realizing that she should be afraid of him, before announcing her agreement with a soft smile and a hand through his hair. She was just as good at pretending as he was.

"Oh course, Eddie. You know your mother's always here to take care you," she said it tenderly, her heart so full of that feeling that she thought was love but was really fear and dependence and a need for control.

"Thanks, ma," he said smiling brightly up at her.

In that moment, if the house were to catch on fire he'd save the letter before he saved her. But then that was assuming he'd save her at all.

Five hours later, when bills had been paid and gameshows had been watched, Eddie was finally able to retreat up to his room.

Before the door was even shut, he'd had the letter out and half open. He was shoving a chair under the doorknob (his mother didn't allow any locks on doors other than the ones leading outside- including the bathroom), when he realized it was completely blank.

He sank to the floor as he flipped over the piece of notebook paper to check the other side. But it was what it was—completely blank.

Hot tears welled in his eyes and his breathing thinned. It was a mistake. It couldn't be blank. Richie wasn't so cruel. Not Richie who had let him kiss him. Not Richie who made him laugh. Not Richie who—

The realization of why the paper was blank hit him suddenly and sent him scrambling for the shelf where he kept his markers. He grabbed a blue one out of a plastic tub and almost sent the whole thing flying, but managed to shove it back. He then flew back to the paper on the floor and began coloring the entire thing in blue marker.

It'd been last year when Richie had gotten the 'invisible pen,' the white marker (not a pen despite the name) that drew on clear but then could be seen when you colored over it. For months Richie had used the damn thing to write secret messages to his friends, which more often than not consisted of dick pictures. Eddie had almost forgotten about it. But luckily only almost.

Words appeared before him and Eddie felt his breathing evening out again. Within a few seconds he had a letter in front of him, one so secret that Richie had made sure that Mrs. Kaspbrak hadn't been able to read it. Eddie wanted to savor it. He read it quickly instead and then read it over and over again until the words were memorized.

*My dearest, most darling, most specialest Eds,*

*I wish I was writing this from my new house, but I'm not. I'm writing from my bedroom, where a few minutes ago you climbed out my window, and a minute after that I puked out of it (what a busy hole in the wall, am I right?).*

*Anyway, I wish I knew what to write you. It's hard because you just left, and the thing most on my mind in kissing you again. Yowza, kissing is fun. But I also want to talk to you more, pinch your cheeks, and maybe get married and get a dog or something. You make a guy feel awfully queer, Kaspbrak.*

*I guess a good thing to say is that I'm glad you kissed me. I'm sorry I was scared to. It's fucking nuts to think I would have spent my last night sleeping instead of with my tongue in your mouth. Fuck, that's where my tongue was meant to be, Eds. And I guess the rest of me was meant to be with the rest of you.*

*I don't want to get too sappy with this, but I really love you, Eddie. A lot. I think maybe I have since I met you. I saw your cute little cheeks and was hooked. Or maybe it was just how you talked. You always had a comeback or sometimes something nice to say. I really like that. I hope when I see you again you have lots to say. You know I'll talk your ear off either way.*

*With all of my heart, soul, and record collection,  
The Love of Your Damn Life,*

## *Richie Tozier*

*P.S. 25 years or sooner, your ass is mine, Eds. Anyone else can forget it.*

Eddie stayed up late into the night looking at the letter, running his fingertips over it until they were stained blue with marker. He thought about the night they'd shared only a few days ago and dreamed of sharing more of them. He imagined them older, away from their parents, just being together. He'd have a Cadillac and Richie would always ride shotgun and control the music, and maybe they'd have a dog sitting in the backseat. Eddie figured his mother was lying about him being allergic anyway.

And they'd be with the other losers, too. All of them together, taking drives and going wherever they wanted to go. And he and Richie would be holding hands, and their friends wouldn't care. No—they would care. Because they'd be *happy* for them.

In the back of his mind something tried to nip at Eddie's fantasy, something dark that wanted him to remember that when he saw Richie again it wouldn't be anywhere near as wonderful as he was imagining it.

But he pushed it away and kept the darkness out of his pure dreams. He thought of blissful, happy things until he could barely keep his eyes open, and then he folded up the letter and hid it in the trunk of his largest and most favorite model car (one of few hiding spots he didn't think his mother had discovered yet).

Over the course of the next few months Eddie read the letter hundreds of times. No one had heard from Richie other than that one letter, just as they suspected no one would. So when Eddie missed him he pulled out his letter and thought about a future where they were together. He figured he'd pay whatever price was necessary for that. And when his time in Derry was coming to a close, he packed the letter up with his model cars and hoped that it would mean something to the him that would be reborn in New York.

Eddie spent his final childhood days in Derry with his friends, much like Richie had before he left.

He smoked his first cigarette ever with Bev, coughing the whole time but not stopping because the burning itch from smoking felt nothing like the constriction he felt when he was having an 'asthma' attack. Bev also didn't care about the fit that his lungs were throwing, instead letting him choke it out because she said he wasn't smoking any worse than she had the first time.

In between coughs they talked about everything, a stark change from their usual time alone. In the past when it was just the two of them, they were quiet. It had never been an uncomfortable quiet, but one that was soft and safe. One where they passed comics back and forth, and usually the only noise happened when they caught each other's eyes over a book and started laughing for no reason. Or maybe the reason had simply been because together they felt light.

But the last time they talked they weren't quiet because the safety they felt together was cracking and neither of them could bare to ignore it.

They talked about forgetting.

Bev told him about how she'd known she'd never hear from Richie again, but couldn't say it to him or even to herself until it happened. She talked about how she'd felt guilty because she'd tried to convince herself that Stan just hadn't wanted to call and that Richie would want to, and how awful the thought was because Stan wasn't like that.

Eddie told her that he'd talked to Richie that night, leaving out that they'd kissed because telling her that would have felt like saying '*I miss him more*' when he knew that he could never miss him any more or any less than Bev or the other losers did. He told her that Richie had known what was coming, that he was facing it how he did everything, with terrible jokes and a forced confidence that had everyone believing in Richie, even when Richie didn't.

They talked about how scared they were of forgetting who they'd grown to be. They'd both learned what love really was that summer and forgetting that terrified them in a way that none of the others could have understood. They both promised that they'd learn again if they had to, even if it wasn't for 25 years.

They cried together. Frantic tears as they both tried to put into words their fear and their love.

And then they spent their last half hour together in silence, wrapped into one another trying to absorb the safety they felt together before they had to part, Bev to help her mother and Eddie to meet with Ben and Mike.

Mike took Eddie and Ben fishing. He told them about how sometimes a man needed to go fishing, about how he'd taken Richie fishing, and about how he regretted not taking Stan.

None of them could imagine Stan putting the muddy worms on the hook, but Mike said he would have done that part for him; fishing wasn't actually about the fishing.

Eddie found that he agreed with that as he spent the afternoon on the boat. They put worms on hooks and pulled fish out of the water, one flopping onto Ben's face before falling out of the boat while they all cackled, but that wasn't the point. It was the freedom and the peace. There was a certain ease that fell over Eddie as the three of them sat shoulder to shoulder with poles in their hands looking out at the water. Fishing wasn't about fishing.

When they got back to the house Mike had offered to teach them to gut the fish and Ben and Eddie had foolishly agreed. As it turned out, the worms were not the grossest part of the fishing experience. Eddie couldn't believe when he heard that Mike had spared Richie the gutting experience. Of course the one person who might have almost enjoyed it got out of it. But still they laughed throughout the process and Eddie left feeling more like an adult (at least an un-traumatized one) than he ever had.

It was dark when he left, but he didn't go home. He went to Bill's house. He had one more full day in Derry before he left early in the morning and he planned to spend that time with Bill.

Bill had been home from Bangor for about an hour when Eddie arrived. The two immediately went to the kitchen where Eddie called his mother on the Denbrough's telephone while Bill stood watch in the kitchen doorway.

Eddie told his mother that he was staying the night at Bill's and then all of the next day too. They fought for a few minutes, which ended with Eddie telling her that if she wanted to call the cops to get him home, then that was fine. He'd just throw the biggest, most dramatic fit anyone in Derry had ever seen, and he'd make sure it was good and public, too. He promised it'd be one so big that the embarrassment would follow her all the way to New York.

He then hung up the phone and the two boys let Bill's parents know that Sonia was okay with Eddie staying the night. When the cops didn't show up, the two boys laughed and joked that she must have been.

The two boys stayed up late listening to records quietly while they read comic books. They finally went to sleep at the third warning they received from Bill's mother for noise.

They both crawled into Bill's bed after Eddie had changed into some of Bill's oversized pajamas. At some point in their friendship Bill's father had mentioned that they were really too old to be sharing a bed anymore, and they had stopped because Bill's father had taken the time to acknowledge Bill to say it.

But this time it wasn't a discussion. Eddie didn't ask if he could and Bill didn't ask if he wanted to, and no look was shared between them. They simply got in the bed together, went to sleep shoulder to shoulder, and woke up holding each other.

They spent the next day together. They went all over Derry, Bill riding Eddie double as they went too fast through the streets, making the most of their time and challenging cars to hit them.

They saw a movie at the Aladdin, then got burgers from the bowling alley, which they ate before going to the train tracks. Usually Eddie went to the tracks alone. He liked watching the trains go, loved it when one carrying cars went by. But this time he wanted Bill with him.

They watched for a long time and they talked. Bill was able to put into words why Eddie liked it. He waxed poetry about freedom that Eddie would have never been able to form in his mind, let alone state

verbally. But Bill had a way with words and a way with Eddie, and Eddie loved him fiercely for it.

*'Do y-you want me to stay the n-n-night so t-that I'm there in the morning?' Bill had asked suddenly when they were getting ready to leave the tracks.*

Eddie had stood stock still, the answer stuck in his throat. He wondered if that was how talking felt for Bill all the time. *'I'd rather you didn't.'*

*'I'm g-glad. I-I don't think I-I could sta-and it. W-watching y-you go, I mean.'* Bill had said, and his stutter had been so bad that Eddie had grabbed him and hugged him firmly, Bill's head falling on his shoulder.

*'I don't want you to see me cry this time, Bill. I'm always crying in front of you. I just want to be strong for you for once.'* Eddie confessed, tears only held back by the force of his will.

*'You have been.'* And then Bill had pulled away and looked at him and something in his eyes said he was remembering, but his gaze was so intense and for a second Eddie thought he might kiss him and then he burst out into laughter so hard that he did cry a little.

Bill had been grinning suddenly, *'I was serious!'*

But Eddie shook his head as his laughter quieted, *'I was just remembering something that Richie said before he left.'* God, could he picture Richie with that 'I told you so' grin, egging him on to give Bill a big wet one even though he knew Eddie wouldn't.

*'S-Something Richie said made y-you laugh?'* Bill had asked, smirk on his face, and then they were both giggling the way 13 year olds did when something was too funny.

After they left the tracks they wandered through town. They hit up more of their favorite spots, talking and laughing the whole time as though they had nothing to worry about. And for awhile it really did feel like there was nothing to worry about.

Eddie had felt good with Bill by his side, like nothing could touch

him. It always felt like that when Bill was around though. Because when Bill was around you could outrun the devil and your lungs were as big as buildings.

But then it had gotten dark, and as the night chill had set in Bill had walked Eddie home, pushing his bike beside them to stretch out their time together.

They stopped a house away from Eddie's where they wouldn't be seen by Sonia, who they knew was in the living room peeking out the blinds every 30 second or so.

*'G-guess this is it. You su-ure you d-don't want me t-to stay?' Bill had asked as he laid Silver down in the grass gently.*

*'Yeah. You still sure you don't want to?' Eddie had asked.*

*'Yeah.'*

Then they'd hugged for a long moment in the dark, and it was only when Eddie had felt Bill's body shake that he'd realized that Big Bill was crying.

He'd been shocked and hadn't known what to do at first. He'd never thought that Bill would cry when he was holding it together. So Eddie had pulled him in closer and tried to steady himself.

*'It's okay, Billy.'* Eddie had tried, even as tears welled in his own eyes.

*'I-I'm sc-scared I-I-I'm gonna b-be l-last,'* Bill had spit out, a complete stuttering mess in Eddie's arms.

*'What are you talking about?' Eddie had asked even though if he'd taken a moment to think about it, he would have known.*

Bill had pulled away from Eddie, wiping his eyes as he spoke, *'E-everyone's l-l-l-l—FUCK! Leaving! S-Someone's g-g-going to leave l-last.'*

It felt the way it did every winter when Richie would put a handful of snow down his jacket. He always knew it was going to happen, but he never thought about it enough to expect it. The cold sting shocked him every time.

Eddie had known when they left that they would forget, but he didn't let himself dwell on the fact that one by one they were leaving Derry. It wasn't coincidence, he didn't think. They were all being forced out. Probably they all would be.

And that meant that one person would be last. One person would watch everyone go. Feel the pain of losing the six people who made them invincible. And then they would be left alone in the town where it happened. Where It lived.

Even if it was just for a little while, just a week or two, Eddie didn't know how any of them could stand it. Derry was bad- a town filled with blood once you got to looking. How could any of them be expected to be there alone?

*'I-I'm s-scared it's gonna b-be me. But I-I'm scared it w-won't be. I d-don't wa-want it t-to be any of t-them,'* Then Bill had gone stick straight, tears drying at once, and Eddie had feared his next words. *'E-Eddie, It's in the sewer. Did... Is It dead?'*

Bill hadn't looked like he had fully understood the question he had asked, and truthfully Eddie hadn't either. But they were both still terrified. They understood plenty enough to be terrified.

Eddie latched onto Bill and held him tight. Something inside him told him that, no, whatever it was wasn't dead. That's what they were coming back for.

*'I don't know, Bill.'* But he did know, and so did Bill.

*'You'll come back?'* Bill's stuttering had stopped.

*'For you, Bill.'* And Eddie knew that he would, for Bill and for the rest of them.

Bill had squeezed his shoulders and then he'd disconnected their bodies. He'd nodded and Eddie had nodded back, and then they'd gone their separate ways.

Eddie had barely made it through the door before his tears started. But he hadn't cried in front of Bill and that had been enough.

Eddie and Sonia Kaspbrak left early in the morning for New York despite having had a rather late night. Sonia had been up waiting for Eddie to return home (*'I was so worried I was about to call the police!'*), and when he'd entered into the front door only to immediately break out into tears, she had panicked.

It had taken Eddie near half an hour to explain that he wasn't hurt or sick; he was sad (*'Do you know what sad is? Am I allowed to feel anything without having to go to the emergency room?'*).

And then his mother had cried, and then he'd cried more, and it'd continued until finally they'd both had enough and had gone to their separate bedrooms.

Suffice it to say, the trip thus far had been awkward and tense. Eddie had only spoken to his mother in clipped sentences in the morning and hadn't talked to her at all on the cab ride to the train station.

It wasn't until they were boarded onto the train, their own private compartment (too many germs otherwise), that Sonia couldn't seem to stand the silence any longer.

"How do you like the train, Eddie? I know you've always wanted to ride in one."

A part of Eddie wanted to bite out, *'Yeah, and you never let me until it was convenient for you,'* or perhaps something even nastier, but he knew it wasn't fair.

She was his mother, and she was honestly trying. He knew she wasn't impressed with the train, the way she wasn't impressed by most things that had a possibility of crashing, but she was pretending for him. Or at the very least she wasn't complaining about it to his face.

Eddie shrugged. "The inside doesn't look like I thought it would. I thought it'd be more industrial."

Eddie wondered how much of his mother was actually his mother and how much of her was Derry. As they chugged along the tracks, getting farther and farther from his hometown, Eddie could feel the forgetting starting. Already *the bad thing* that had happened that

summer had been reduced to *the bad thing*. Eddie couldn't for the life of him remember what it was, but he knew it was the reason why he was forgetting.

He wondered if his mother would forget things too. He wondered if she would still be as overbearing in New York, and if there she would still want him to be sick if that's what it took for him not to leave her.

He thought for a moment that maybe there was a chance that while he was forgetting who he was, his mother was forgetting what Derry had made her. Maybe she could learn to love him right. Maybe he could love her and still keep his breath.

But then Sonia Kaspbrak spoke.

"I don't know what's been happening to you, Eddie, but things will be different in New York. They'll be better. We'll go back to how it used to be. You'll be my sweet little boy again; I know you will. And I won't ever let anything bad happen to you."

Fear and anger boiled up and fought within Eddie as his lungs threatened to squeeze him dry of air.

She wanted to go back to before. Back to broken lungs, no friends, and fear. So much fear. Choking fear.

She'd never change. She was born in Derry, and Derry lived inside her. She would choke him. God if he let her, she would choke him.

And he was forgetting.

He couldn't breathe.

"Eddie? Eddie! Let me get someone!" She stood to get help, but before she could open their compartment door he grabbed her arm like a vice.

His breathing was shallow, but he spoke, "No." He forced his breathing to even, replacing his fear with all the anger he had.

"Eddie, you need your inhaler. And I need to find a doctor—"

"I said no." His voice didn't shake, and his lungs were filled.

"Eddie—"

"I don't need a doctor, and I don't need my damn inhaler because I don't have *fucking* asthma," Sonia moaned in sorrow at his choice of language. "But I do need you to listen to me, because things *are* going to be different in New York. Because you don't have any bargaining chips there. Without my friends around there's nothing for you to use against me, nothing for you to trade. You don't have a way to control me anymore, Ma. So get used to that. You did it to yourself."

His mother's tears dried instantly, and she stared at him dumbfounded. But it wasn't just that. In that moment he was a stranger to her, a stranger in her delicate son's body making demands of his behalf. He was an adult, and she was scared of him.

But the moment passed and she shook her head quickly, almost in an uncontrollable way. "This isn't you. This isn't you. It'll get better. I know it will. I know it."

"I hate you." It was the only time he'd ever said it to her, and a part of him couldn't believe that he had. But a bigger part of him, the part of him that had grown out of the summer with the sewers that he no longer remembered, felt righteous. She deserved to be hated for what she had created out of him, for what she had tried to make him be. Her delicate, fragile boy who was too afraid to leave her side.

But that wasn't him. He wasn't delicate or fragile. He was strong, he could run, and he could *breathe*. He was brave. So brave that the only thing he truly feared anymore was forgetting that.

His words were a final stand. Let her know how things would be, so that even if he forgot his demands, she wouldn't. Let her remember that he hated her, even if he forgot. Even if it was pushed so far down inside of himself that it only came up to help fight the choking when he was sure he was going to take his last breath. Let her remember. And let it be enough for things to change.

She didn't say anything in response. Maybe she knew that if she pushed him, his words would only hit harder. Maybe she was too

angry. Maybe she was too scared. Maybe she hated him too, because she'd only ever known how to love things that bent the way she wanted them to. But it didn't matter. She turned away from him, and they sat in silence.

Eddie closed his eyes as he leaned his head against the cool glass window of the train, not wanting to get distracted by the scenery passing by.

He closed his eyes, and he thought about the things he wanted to remember, about the six people who he loved so dearly and so much more than himself. He thought of their faces and how they made him laugh.

And then slowly he felt the details leave him.

He forgot the finer features of their faces and which comics were their favorites, but it wasn't until he realized that he couldn't remember Bill's last name that he truly began to panic.

Bill. Big Bill. Big Bill what? What was his last name? Eddie couldn't remember. But he knew that Bill had been there the longest. That he'd known Bill since he could remember knowing anybody. But he was still losing him.

Why was he losing Bill? Bill hadn't become part of his life when... When the others had. Bill had *always* been there. Why was he forgetting him too?

It wasn't fair. He hadn't prepared for the loss the way he had the others. How had he known to prepare at all?

Silent tears were rolling down his face as he tried to hold on to his memories. He was losing them. He was losing all six of them.

*Fuck, fuck, fuck.*

He couldn't hold on. He knew he couldn't. There was no way to hold them all, not even to hold one. So instead he picked one moment. One moment to signify everything he was losing.

He thought of kissing Richie. Of kissing a boy in awkward light with

big glasses and unruly hair. He thought of being brave, brave enough to kiss a boy. He loved that boy. He loved his friend.

He ran the image through his mind on a loop, and each time it lost a little bit of detail.

It was like holding a fist full of sand, and little by little the grains ran through his fingers.

He forgot who the boy was and what he looked like. He forgot how it'd felt to kiss him. He forgot why they were kissing in the first place.

By the time the train arrived at the station, Eddie's memory of Richie was at best a faceless daydream that he was trying to hold onto.

"Eddie, we're here," his mother said softly from the seat across from him.

He looked to her startled, having forgotten that she was there. And in that startled moment, it was as if he'd opened his fist and dropped the remaining bits of sand caught in his hand.

He stood up to follow her, and effectively wiped the sand away on his shorts.

"I'm coming, Ma."

And just like that, he didn't remember Richie Tozier.

It was the next day when Eddie sat in his new bedroom unpacking boxes. The day before he and his mother had unpacked the essentials quietly before she had sent him to his empty room to sleep at 8 o'clock while she watched gameshows by herself.

It had been strange, usually they watched game shows together, but he hadn't dared argue. He figured she just wanted him to get some sleep since the train ride had been so long. Besides, he hadn't minded. He wasn't sure why he'd been crying on the train, but he knew that he had been. So he must have been tired.

He opened another box, peeling back packing tape with his fingers

because he knew his mother would never trust him with the box cutter she'd been using the night before (frankly she didn't seem to trust herself with it, given how she had held it as far away from her body as her arm would allow).

Inside the box were Eddie's favorite model cars. He smiled at them the way he would a friend (if he had any), before he began carefully unpacking them from the box. He aligned them all on the floor in front of him, wanting to make a plan as to how to position them on his new shelf. It wasn't until he was halfway through the process that he stopped, a feeling of *déjà vu* practically slamming into his gut. But it didn't feel like something he'd done before... Maybe something he'd watched someone do? He didn't know, and when he poked at the thought, trying to remember, all he got was a feeling of dread.

So he pushed the feeling far away and continued unpacking his box, no longer caring if the cars were in a straight and organized line. Once they were all sitting out in front of him, Eddie began placing them on the shelf. Smaller ones sat on the far sides of the shelf, and then bigger cars beside them, leaving the space in the middle for the biggest (and also his favorite) car.

He grabbed the model carefully and held it in his hands, inspecting it, although for what he wasn't sure.

The car was a large '57 Cadillac DeVille, a model that Eddie desperately wanted to own one day, made extra special to him because of the detail spent on the inner workings of the car. It wasn't every day you got a model where you actually had to put engine pieces together. But Eddie had loved it for that. It was practice for when he could do the real thing.

A thought struck Eddie suddenly and he stared at the car as though he'd never seen it before.

Where the hell did he get it? Who got it for him?

His mother didn't appreciate his interest in cars (*'Cars are death traps, Eddie, even for healthy people. And you with your poor lungs- what if you had an asthma attack on the road? And fixing them! Only dirty people are mechanics, Eddie. You'll be a business man. That's really what you're'*

*most suited to.*), so she never would have bought it for him.

He didn't have any friends back in Derry, so that was ruled out. Even if he'd had friends, it was an expensive model. He would have had to have had several friends all pitching in to buy it. Ha, what a thought. Eddie being friends with someone who didn't birth him.

Could it have been one of his aunts? It almost had to have been. But he couldn't imagine any of them giving him a gift he liked so much. The only thing they really knew about him was how his cheeks felt when they were pinching them.

But he supposed it didn't matter where the car came from. Why kick a gift horse?

He went to put the car on the shelf when he noticed that the trunk latch wasn't shut. Rather than pushing it shut, he opened it up. Inside he found a piece of folded paper, blue ink leaking through it.

He grabbed the paper before gently setting the model car on the shelf. Like the car itself, Eddie had no idea where it'd come from, but that made him all the more curious.

Upon opening the sheet it took him a moment to process that within the blue ink there was messy white scrawl, but once he'd made the discovery he immediately began reading the text (text that should have been illegible because of the penmanship combined with the writing utensil used, but that Eddie could read as though he'd had years of practice at it).

He made it to the second paragraph before his throat began to tighten.

Kiss him again? He'd kissed someone? This letter couldn't be talking about him.

But it was addressed to *him*. It had his first and last name, along with an awful attempt at a nickname. It had to be to him. But how did he not remember kissing someone? How had this note gotten into his car? He had to have been the one to have put it there. And the ink was smudged in so many places from where it'd been handled before.

*Someone* had read this letter before, and they hadn't been satisfied only reading it once. All signs pointed to him being the culprit.

He pushed onward with the letter, trying not to choke on the air he didn't have as he read. He went quickly, trying to finish before he ran out of breath, but it was difficult when every word tripped him up.

He kissed someone first? With tongue? That someone loved him? Someone *loved* him? How the hell had that happened?

And then he reached the signature and every part of his body froze with it.

*With all of my heart, soul, and record collection,  
The Love of Your Damn Life,  
Richie Tozier*

*The Love of Your Damn Life,  
Richie Tozier*

*Richie Tozier*

*Richie*

A boy. He'd kissed a boy.

Oh, fuck, he'd kissed a boy.

He should be choking but suddenly his stomach was flipping and it felt *good*.

Could it really be true? Could he have kissed a boy? Could one be in love with him?

That would be awful. It'd be gross. That was how people got sick. How many times had his mother said so?

But, oh, how his stomach was flipping pleasantly at the mere thought that it could be true.

But then he heard his mother's heavy steps coming down the hall, and he *panicked*. His mother *couldn't* see the note. She'd take him to

the hospital, and he'd never leave.

It was automatic as his hands ripped the letter to shreds and let the pieces fall into a garbage bag that he'd set aside for his trash from unpacking. He didn't have time to be horrified at his action before his mother walked into the room.

"Eddie, do you- Are you okay?" His mother suddenly looked terrified as she hurried over to him.

"D...Dust," he lied as he dug into his back pocket for his inhaler. When he didn't find it he patted all of his pockets down before he looked up at her desperately. "I-I don't... My inhaler."

For a second she looked shocked, but Eddie couldn't focus on that when he felt like his throat was about to collapse. Luckily his mother came back to action quickly.

"Here, Eddie, I have your spare inhaler." She pulled the thing out of the pocket of her housecoat as though she'd been prepared to need it, and Eddie was thankful for it.

Eddie grabbed the inhaler and quickly took two puffs before his breathing evened out.

"Thank you, Momma," Eddie said gratefully. "I don't know what happened to mine."

To Eddie's surprise, his mother just stared at him. It was like she was waiting on him to give her the punch line to a joke, like *'Just kidding, Ma! I had it the whole time! I just love that burning feeling in my lungs!'* But when none came she broke into a grin.

"That's okay, Eddie. We can go to the pharmacy and get you another one tomorrow," she said softly as she ran a hand through his hair gingerly.

"Thank you, Momma. Sorry I lost mine."

"That's okay, sweetie. You probably lost it on the train; they're a terrible way to travel. I'm just glad I was here to take care of you. Who knows what would have happened if I hadn't been."

Eddie's lungs clenched at the thought.

"Why don't I get some of this trash out of your room so there isn't so much dust?" His mother asked, already picking up the garbage bag. "And you go wash up for dinner. We can eat while we watch Wheel of Fortune."

Eddie wanted to argue, his eyes stuck on the blue strips of paper that used to comprise a note, but he knew that he couldn't. There was no reason to keep the trash other than the truth, which he couldn't ever admit to. And even if he could, he'd never be able to piece the note together again. So instead he nodded silently, and he watched as his mother took out the trash along with any sign that a boy named Richie Tozier had ever loved him.

Once his mother had left the room Eddie took another hit from his inhaler before wiping at his eyes, which had begun to water.

Whoever Richie had been talking about in his letter, it wasn't Eddie. He would never be brave enough to kiss a boy, let alone love one. A voice in the back of his head wanted to argue- that obviously he was that brave (Look at the evidence, Numbnuts). But Eddie looked down at his spare inhaler and choked back the tears.

If the Eddie in that letter had ever existed he was sure as hell gone now.

But, God, how Eddie wished that was who he was.

But he wasn't. He was just a delicate boy who needed his mother to keep him from suffocating.

But, *God*, he wished.